UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

KRISTIE SMALL, 6348 Cavalier Corridor Falls Church, VA 22044) Case No. 1:19-cv-1314)
Plaintiff,)
v.) JURY TRIAL DEMANDED
OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR,)
2372 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515,))
Defendant.)) _)

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff KRISTIE SMALL, by her undersigned counsel, and complains of Defendant OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR as follows:

NATURE OF THE CASE

- 1. Hiring Kristie Small as Deputy Chief of Staff was an easy decision for Congressman Henry Cuellar. Small was an ideal candidate for the position. She has a degree in Political Science and 14 years of experience working on Capitol Hill. Her record is outstanding, and she welcomes a challenge. Small began working for Cuellar on June 1, 2018. She dove into her new duties —training staff in DC and Texas, familiarizing herself with Cuellar's legislative issues, and improving office efficiency. She received positive feedback from both Cuellar and his staff.
- 2. But everything changed on August 8, 2018. Shortly after she began working for Cuellar, Small learned that she was pregnant. On August 8, she emailed Cuellar to request maternity

leave, per office policy. Cuellar responded: "Ok let's talk about this and probation period for you as I have for every new employee." This was curious. Cuellar had never mentioned a probation period before he learned about Small's pregnancy. Contrary to what he said, none of the other employees had been on a probationary period. However, none of those employees were pregnant women.

3. On October 16, 2018, Cuellar called Small on the phone and fired her for failing to perform during a probationary period that only applied to pregnant female employees. This is an action to recover damages for Defendant's unlawful discrimination, in violation of the Congressional Accountability Act ("CAA").

JURISDICTON AND VENUE

- 4. This Court has jurisdiction over the claims pursuant to 2 U.S.C. § 1408(a). Plaintiff (a) is a covered employee by virtue of her employment with Defendant; (b) completed counseling and mediation pursuant to 2 U.S.C. §§ 1402–03; and (c) timely filed this civil action.
- 5. Venue is proper because Defendant formerly employed Plaintiff in the District of Columbia.

THE PARTIES

- 6. During the relevant time period, Plaintiff was Defendant's employee within the meaning and subject to the protections of the CAA.
- 7. Defendant is a federal legislative entity primarily located in the U.S. Capitol Complex in Washington, DC.
- 8. During the relevant time period, Defendant was Plaintiff's employer within the meaning and subject to the requirements of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as applied by the CAA.

EXHAUSTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

9. Plaintiff exhausted her administrative remedies pursuant to the CAA.

- 10. On October 23, 2018, Plaintiff submitted a request for counseling for claims of sex discrimination and pregnancy discrimination.
- 11. The mediation period began on November 20, 2018, and ended on February 5, 2019.
- 12. Plaintiff timely files this Complaint no sooner than 30 days, but no later than 90 days, from the end of mediation.

FACTS

Plaintiff is a member of a protected class.

- 13. Plaintiff is female, as is evident based on her name, physical appearance, and other indicators.
- 14. Defendant learned that Plaintiff is female when Cuellar interviewed Plaintiff in May 2018.
- 15. During the relevant time period, Plaintiff was pregnant.
- 16. Plaintiff informed Cuellar about her pregnancy on August 8, 2018.

Plaintiff has 14 years of experience working on Capitol Hill.

- 17. Plaintiff graduated from West Virginia University with a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a concentration in English.
- 18. Shortly thereafter, Plaintiff began working on Capitol Hill as a Scheduler/Staff Assistant.
- 19. She excelled in her role and was promoted to Legislative Assistant the following year.
- In May 2007, Plaintiff became a Professional Staff member for a standing committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- 21. Plaintiff had an excellent performance record and no history of misconduct.

Cuellar hired Plaintiff as Deputy Chief of Staff.

- 22. In May 2018, Plaintiff applied to work for Defendant as Cuellar's Deputy Chief of Staff.
- 23. Cuellar learned that Plaintiff is female when he first interviewed her in May 2018.

24. At a subsequent interview, Cuellar offered Plaintiff the position of Deputy Chief of Staff, and Plaintiff accepted.

Plaintiff successfully performed her job duties.

- 25. Plaintiff began her employment with Defendant on June 1, 2018.
- 26. Throughout Plaintiff's employment with Defendant, the Chief of Staff position was vacant.
- 27. Therefore, Plaintiff served as Acting Chief of Staff, and she reported directly to Cuellar.
- 28. Plaintiff's duties included serving as Cuellar's principal liaison; supervising employees; reviewing and approving work product; establishing office policies and procedures; and overseeing the office budget and operations.
- 29. Plaintiff immediately encountered significant challenges. Cuellar's office was disorganized and lacked policies and procedures.
- 30. Plaintiff generally worked at least 10 hours each day to complete her assigned duties, as well as to resolve long-standing administrative issues.
- 31. Despite Plaintiff's heavy workload and numerous responsibilities, she made significant improvements in the office by establishing policies and procedures, conducting staff training, and improving overall efficiency.
- 32. Cuellar was aware of Plaintiff's long hours and resolution of many long-standing issues because she sent him an email at the end of each day outlining her accomplishments for the day, per Cuellar's request.
- 33. Cuellar and his staff gave Plaintiff positive feedback about her performances and the changes she was implementing in the office.

Cuellar put Plaintiff on probation after learning she was pregnant.

34. Shortly after she began working for Cuellar, Plaintiff learned that she was pregnant.

- 35. Pursuant to the Employee Handbook, Plaintiff was entitled to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.
- 36. On August 8, 2018, Plaintiff emailed Cuellar to advise that she was pregnant and to request maternity leave, per the Employee Handbook:

Hi Sir,

Attached I have provided an excerpt from the office maternity leave policy along with my written request for leave. I have also included the pre-natal appointments process for your information. I can go over this with you at any time I just wanted to make sure it was on your radar. Thank you.

37. That afternoon, Cuellar responded by email:

Ok let's talk about this and probation period for you as I have for every new employee. Trying to finish all items for tomorrow and for Friday. Need your help. Also, I have two interviews tomorrow morning and no one has asked: What do you need? Need your help.

(emphasis added).

- 38. This was the first time Cuellar said anything about a probation period. He later informed Plaintiff that she was subject to a 90-day probation period.
- 39. The Employee Handbook did not mention a probationary period.
- 40. Plaintiff asked several of her colleagues about probation. None of them had been on a probationary period or knew anything about it.
- 41. As far as she knows, Plaintiff was the only pregnant female employee, and she was the only employee subject to a probationary period.

Cuellar gave Plaintiff positive feedback on September 5, 2018.

- 42. On September 5, 2018, Cuellar met with Plaintiff to discuss her performance during the 90-day probationary period established when Plaintiff requested maternity leave.
- 43. Cuellar told Plaintiff that she was doing a good job and had a great attitude, but that she

needed to work on a few issues.

- 44. However, Cuellar's criticisms were false.
- 45. Most of the issues Cuellar mentioned predated Plaintiff's employment, and all of them had improved since Plaintiff joined the office.
- 46. Cuellar knew about those improvements because Plaintiff sent him daily status reports and otherwise kept him updated about her work.
- 47. Cuellar told Plaintiff they would meet in 30 days to revisit the issues discussed, thus extending the 90-day probationary period by 30 days.
- 48. After the meeting, Plaintiff continued to successfully perform her duties.

Cuellar fired Plaintiff on October 16, 2018.

- 49. Cuellar scheduled a call with Plaintiff on October 16, 2018, to discuss her performance during the extension of the probationary period.
- 50. On October 16, 2018, Cuellar called Plaintiff and terminated her employment for failure to perform during the probationary period.
- 51. At Plaintiff's request, Cuellar identified the specific tasks he claimed she failed to complete.
- 52. However, the reasons Cuellar gave for firing Plaintiff were false.
- 53. Plaintiff successfully completed the tasks Cuellar identified and otherwise performed her assigned duties throughout her employment.
- 54. Defendant's conduct had a devastating impact on Plaintiff's life.
- 55. Approximately two weeks after Defendant fired her, Plaintiff delivered her baby, who was stillborn. At the time, Plaintiff was 30 weeks pregnant.

COUNT 1

(2 U.S.C. § 1311(a)(1) – Sex Discrimination)

56. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1–55, above, as if fully set forth herein.

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57. Defendant terminated Plaintiff's employment on the basis of gender and sex.

58. By and through its conduct, Defendant discriminated against Plaintiff in violation of the CAA.

59. Defendant's actions were intentional, reckless, and/or malicious.

60. As a result, Plaintiff has suffered damages, including lost wages and benefits, pain and

suffering, emotional distress, and mental anguish.

COUNT 2

(2 U.S.C. § 1311(a)(1) – Pregnancy Discrimination)

61. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1–60, above, as if fully set forth herein.

62. Defendant terminated Plaintiff's employment on the basis of pregnancy.

63. By and through its conduct, Defendant discriminated against Plaintiff in violation of the CAA.

64. Defendant' actions were intentional, reckless, and/or malicious.

65. As a result, Plaintiff has suffered damages, including lost wages and benefits, pain and

suffering, emotional distress, and mental anguish.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all Counts.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment against

Defendant on all counts and award Plaintiff reinstatement; lost wages and benefits;

compensatory damages in the amount of \$300,000 for pain and suffering and emotional distress;

pre- and post-judgment interest; costs; attorney's fees; and any such other relief as is just and

proper.

Date: May 6, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

ALAN LESCHT AND ASSOCIATES, P.C.

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By: ____/s/ Sara McDonough
Alan Lescht [441691]
Sara McDonough [1022641]
Krista Wallace [1048016]
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krista.wallace@leschtlaw.com
Counsel for Plaintiff

Case 1:19-cv-01314 Document 1-1 Filed 05/06/19 Page 1 of 2 CIVIL COVER SHEET

		DEFENDANTS		
KRISTIE SMALL		OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR		
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O G. Habeas Corpus/ 2255 ☐ 530 Habeas Corpus – General ☐ 510 Motion/Vacate Sentence ☐ 463 Habeas Corpus – Alien Detainee	O H. Employment Discrimination 442 Civil Rights – Employment (criteria: race, gender/sex, national origin, discrimination, disability, age, religion, retaliation)	O I. FOIA/Privacy Act 895 Freedom of Information Act 890 Other Statutory Actions (if Privacy Act)	O J. Student Loan 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loan (excluding veterans)		
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 ○ K. Labor/ERISA (non-employment) ○ 710 Fair Labor Standards Act ○ 720 Labor/Mgmt. Relations ○ 740 Labor Railway Act ○ 751 Family and Medical Leave Act ○ 790 Other Labor Litigation ○ 791 Empl. Ret. Inc. Security Act 	O L. Other Civil Rights (non-employment) ☐ 441 Voting (if not Voting Rights Act) ☐ 443 Housing/Accommodations ☐ 440 Other Civil Rights ☐ 445 Americans w/Disabilities — Employment ☐ 446 Americans w/Disabilities — Other ☐ 448 Education	O M. Contract ☐ 110 Insurance ☐ 120 Marine ☐ 130 Miller Act ☐ 140 Negotiable Instrument ☐ 150 Recovery of Overpayment	N. Three-Judge Court 441 Civil Rights – Voting (if Voting Rights Act)		
V. ORIGIN					
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION (CITE THE U.S. CIVIL STATUTE UNDER WHICH YOU ARE FILING AND WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF CAUSE.) Discrimination in violation of the Congressional Accountability Act, 2 U.S.C. 1311					
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT		0 \$ 300,000+ Check Y RY DEMAND: YES	ES only if demanded in complaint NO		
VIII. RELATED CASE(S) IF ANY	(See instruction) YES	NO 🗸 If yes, pl	lease complete related case form		
DATE: <u>May 6, 2019</u>	SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF REC		Gorangh		

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET JS-44 Authority for Civil Cover Sheet

The JS-44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and services of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. Listed below are tips for completing the civil cover sheet. These tips coincide with the Roman Numerals on the cover sheet.

- COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF FIRST LISTED PLAINTIFF/DEFENDANT (b) County of residence: Use 11001 to indicate plaintiff if resident of Washington, DC, 88888 if plaintiff is resident of United States but not Washington, DC, and 99999 if plaintiff is outside the United States.
- III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES: This section is completed <u>only</u> if diversity of citizenship was selected as the Basis of Jurisdiction under Section II.
- IV. CASE ASSIGNMENT AND NATURE OF SUIT: The assignment of a judge to your case will depend on the category you select that best represents the <u>primary</u> cause of action found in your complaint. You may select only <u>one</u> category. You <u>must</u> also select <u>one</u> corresponding nature of suit found under the category of the case.
- VI. CAUSE OF ACTION: Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing and write a brief statement of the primary cause.
- VIII. RELATED CASE(S), IF ANY: If you indicated that there is a related case, you must complete a related case form, which may be obtained from the Clerk's Office.

Because of the need for accurate and complete information, you should ensure the accuracy of the information provided prior to signing the form.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

District of Columbia

KRISTIE SMALL Plaintiff(s)	
V.	Civil Action No. 1:19-cv-13
OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN)
HENRY CUELLAR)
Defendant(s))

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

Hon. William P. Barr

U.S. Attorney General

U.S. Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20530-0001

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

Sara McDonough Alan Lescht and Associates, P.C. 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 750 Washington, DC 20006

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

	CLERK OF COURT
Date:	
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (1))

	This summons for (nam	e of individual and title, if any)		
was rec	ceived by me on (date)		.*	
	☐ I personally served	the summons on the individ	lual at (place)	
			on (date)	; or
	☐ I left the summons a	at the individual's residence	or usual place of abode with (name)	
			erson of suitable age and discretion who res	sides there,
	on (date)	, and mailed a cop	y to the individual's last known address; or	
	☐ I served the summon		1.1.16.6	, who is
	designated by law to a	ccept service of process on	behalf of (name of organization) On (date)	; or
	☐ I returned the summ	ons unexecuted because		-
	☐ Other (specify):			
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00
	I declare under penalty	of perjury that this informa	ation is true.	
Date:				
			Server's signature	
			Printed name and title	
			Server's address	

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

District of Columbia

KRISTIE SMALL Plaintiff(s) V.)) -) Civil Action No. 1:19-cv-1314
OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR Defendant(s)))) -)

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

Jessie K. Liu U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia 555 Fourth Street, NW Washington, DC 20530

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

Sara McDonough Alan Lescht and Associates, P.C. 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 750 Washington, DC 20006

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

	CLERK OF COURT
Date:	
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (1))

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	☐ Other (specify):				
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	I declare under pena	lty of perjury that this info	rmation is true.		
Date:		_			
			Server's signature		
			Printed name and title		
		_	Server's address		

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc:

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

District of Columbia

KRISTIE SMALL))) -
Plaintiff(s)	Civil Action No. 1:19-cv-13
V.) CIVII Action No. 1:19-6V-13
OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN)
HENRY CUELLAR	
Defendant(s))

SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

To: (Defendant's name and address)

Representative Henry Cuellar 2372 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515

A lawsuit has been filed against you.

Within 21 days after service of this summons on you (not counting the day you received it) — or 60 days if you are the United States or a United States agency, or an officer or employee of the United States described in Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (a)(2) or (3) — you must serve on the plaintiff an answer to the attached complaint or a motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The answer or motion must be served on the plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney, whose name and address are:

Sara McDonough Alan Lescht and Associates, P.C. 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 750 Washington, DC 20006

If you fail to respond, judgment by default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint. You also must file your answer or motion with the court.

	CLERK OF COURT
Date:	
	Signature of Clerk or Deputy Clerk

AO 440 (Rev. 06/12) Summons in a Civil Action (Page 2)

Civil Action No.

PROOF OF SERVICE

(This section should not be filed with the court unless required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 4 (1))

		ne of individual and title, if any)		
was re	ceived by me on (date)	·		
	☐ I personally served	the summons on the individual	at (place)	
			on (date)	
	☐ I left the summons	at the individual's residence or	usual place of abode with (name)	
		, a perso	n of suitable age and discretion who res	sides there,
	on (date)	, and mailed a copy to	the individual's last known address; or	
	☐ I served the summo	ons on (name of individual)		, who is
	designated by law to a	accept service of process on beh	alf of (name of organization)	
			on (date)	; or
	☐ I returned the summ	nons unexecuted because		; or
	☐ Other (specify):			
	My fees are \$	for travel and \$	for services, for a total of \$	0.00
	I declare under penalty	y of perjury that this information	is true.	
Date:				
			Server's signature	<u></u>
			Printed name and title	
			Server's address	

Additional information regarding attempted service, etc: